

VZCZCXRO2746
PP RUEHMA RUEHPA
DE RUEHAR #0087/01 0320743
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 010743Z FEB 10
FM AMEMBASSY ACCRA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8846
RUEHAR/AMEMBASSY ACCRA
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0001
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ACCRA 000087

SIPDIS
SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR PRM, AF/FO, AND AF/W
GENEVA FOR RMA

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [LI](#) [GH](#) [SL](#)
SUBJECT: New UNHCR Representative Outlines Challenges in Ghana

Ref: Accra 70

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: UNHCR's new Representative in Ghana, Sharon Cooper, has significant experience working with Liberian refugees and implementing local integration programs. Cooper plans changes in office strategy for broader and more proactive engagement with the government of Ghana, particularly in pursuit of local integration for the remaining Liberian and Sierra Leonean population. While UNHCR plans to invoke the cessation clause for Liberian refugees worldwide in 2010, the GoG currently lacks a strategy to handle the over 11,000 Liberians who will lose their group refugee status. Engaging the GoG on this issue remains a major problem, as the Chair of the Ghana Refugee Board remains vacant, and the GOG remains reluctant to make fundamental decisions regarding the status of the remaining refugees. END SUMMARY.

UNHCR -- New Representative, New Approach

2. UNHCR Representative Sharon Cooper arrived in Ghana in October 2009, replacing Representative Aida Haile Mariam (who is now Representative in Cameroon). Cooper was previously Senior Protection Officer in Liberia working with the return/reintegration of Liberian refugees, internally displaced persons and Sierra Leonean refugees. She told RefCoord December 9 that she intends to refocus office strategy to become more proactive, cultivating additional GoG contacts beyond the GRB, and focusing on the concrete practical issues that would be needed to implement local integration. She is examining Ghanaian laws impacting integration and refugee protection and will prepare an analysis of the gaps between Ghana's refugee and immigration laws to present Ghana with written information and recommendations. She is seeking to improve coordination with other UN agencies and development organizations so that refugees are included in development plans and local communities benefit from projects to support refugee integration.

3. Cooper also intends to expand public information activities, to be implemented by the new Public Information officer, also previously posted in Liberia. She is working to coordinate visits from UNHCR regional offices, organize press coverage, and conduct outreach sessions in the camps with concrete information about local integration. The office will also work with NGOs and the media to educate them about refugee rights.

New Approach, but Old Problems: Liberians in Buduburam

4. There are currently an estimated 11,924 Liberians in Buduburam. UNHCR continues to draw down staffing and services and has ended food distribution. They are turning over facilities in the settlement (including the health clinic, schools, and a

newly-constructed police station) to local and national authorities.

Liberian refugees in Buduburam have access to free primary school and access to health care through the Government of Ghana's National Health Insurance Scheme (UNHCR is paying the enrollment fee). While most assistance has ended, UNHCR continues to conduct skills training and other programs to promote refugees' socio-economic self reliance.

15. The GoG continues to state that it intends to close Buduburam Refugee Settlement and disperse the refugees; however it has no operational or logistical plan to do so. The GoG has not yet made fundamental decisions regarding legal status, social integration or facilitating economic self-sufficiency for the refugees who have (in the case of the Sierra Leoneans) or will (in the case of the Liberians) lose their prima facie refugee status through invocation of the "cessation clause."

16. UNHCR has told us that it intends to invoke the cessation clause for Liberians during the 2010 calendar year. This means that those Liberians who had been recognized as refugees on a prima facie basis will lose their group status. The logistics and procedures for how cessation will be implemented will be determined by GoG, in coordination with UNHCR. In general terms, for a Liberian to retain refugee status, the GRB would have to grant them an exemption from the cessation clause based on a well-founded fear of persecution on the basis of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. Individuals with pending exemption applications are generally treated as asylum seekers and as such, would be protected from forced return until all appeals were exhausted. Ghana's appeals system requires a decision by the Minister of the Interior, which can often take years.

ACCRA 00000087 002 OF 002

17. To remain in Ghana in a non-refugee status, they would need to go through normal immigration channels such as getting a student visa or applying for a residence permit. Under current immigration regulations for residence, an individual must make an exceptional contribution to the country, have matrimonial or parental ties to a Ghanaian national, have an employer willing to sponsor the work permit, or have \$10,000 invested in a business (for those who are self-employed). While some Liberians may qualify on family grounds, most would need to apply for a work permit which would require employment in the formal sector comprising less than 20% of the economy

18. Post and UNHCR believe that it is unlikely there will be progress in the immediate future. The Ghana Refugee Board, dissolved by the Mills government in January 2009, has not yet been re-constituted, nor has the GoG named a new chair. The GRB Secretariat of permanent employees continues to conduct interviews, but without a board there is no authority that can determine refugee status. Furthermore, in the absence of a chair and a functioning Board, UNHCR lacks a key interlocutor with which to discuss and plan local integration. UNHCR officials tell us that they continue to advocate with the GoG for the restoration of a functioning board.

Krisan Refugee camp "De-population"

19. According to UNHCR, the plan for Krisan remains to de-populate the settlement through facilitating repatriation and third-country resettlement and transfer responsibility to the GoG. The population in Krisan (excluding those on resettlement programs and pending departure) is 949 individuals. The population includes 332 Liberians, 118 Sierra Leoneans, 200 Sudanese (both Southern and Darfuri), 259 Togolese and smaller numbers from Rwanda, Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Republic of Congo, and Cote d'Ivoire. As it has in past years, UNHCR Ghana fell far short of their overall resettlement referrals target: in calendar year 2009 they referred only 59 individuals out of an anticipated 300. Although UNHCR had determined that resettlement is the most appropriate durable solution for the 200 Sudanese remaining in Krisan camp who have no realistic prospects for return or local integration, Accra RefCoord has received referrals for only 50 such

individuals this year. Cooper indicated that she intends to pursue resettlement as a durable solution, and indicated that the remaining referrals would be forthcoming.

Comments

¶10. (SBU) Ghana has been a good host to refugees during their time of need, however, that time has passed. The key challenge for UNHCR Ghana and GoG in implementing local integration for the Liberian refugees is to operationalize a specific legal and socio-economic plan before donor interest--and funding-- is exhausted. Cooper appears to understand this challenge, and Refugee Coordinator welcomes the change in the attitude and strategy of the UNHCR Ghana branch office. However, the GoG's reluctance to make decisions regarding refugees' status, exacerbated by the absence of a GRB chair and board, will continue to preclude real progress in local integration.

TEITELBAUM